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SERMON

PREACH'D to the

SOCIETIES

FOR

Reformation of Manners,

AT

SALTERS-HALL;

On MONDAY *June* 26. 1721.

By JOHN BARKER.

PUBLISH'D at their REQUEST.

L O N D O N :

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ON MONDAY

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JOB xxii. 30.

*He shall deliver the Island of the
Innocent : and it is delivered by
the Pureness of thy Hands.*



THE Book of *Job* is intended to present us with a most illustrious Example of sincere Piety in great Prosperity, and eminent Patience under great Adversity. The Piety of *Job* was so well tried that God himself pronounces him *a perfect and* Chap. i. 8. *an upright Man*; and his Patience being largely prov'd by a surprizing Variety of uncommon Calamities, is declared great and exemplary, by an inspired Jam. v. 11. Apostle. The great and sudden Change which befel this eminent Person, was no doubt matter of general Observation, and soon reach'd his Friends in particular, who being Persons of Distinction thought themselves bound by the Laws of Religion and Civility forthwith to visit him: The first sight they had of *Job* struck them into the Posture of Mourners,

they beheld their Friend with Grief and Surprise, and like Men confounded at so miserable a Spectacle, they sat them down
 Ch. ii. 12, without speaking, and spent several
 13. Days in silent Condolance.

THE first who brake the Silence was *Job*, and he does it, as well he might, in the bitterness of his Spirit, making most passionate Complaints of the Miseries of humane Life. To this *Eliphaz*, one of his Friends, replies, but in a manner very different from what might have been expected from a Person of his Religion, Wisdom, and Quality; all his Pity ended with his Silence, and instead of that soft Answer which *Job's* Anguish seemed to require, he speaks as one incensed at his Complaint, and uses a sharp unseasonable Rebuke, instead of a gentle and tender Sympathy. *Eliphaz's* Opinion seems to be this, That *Job* could never be the good Man he had appeared, because of the prodigious Misery now upon him. Suspecting *Job's* Character, therefore he changes his own, and seems to think it his Business to reprove a Criminal, rather than to comfort a pious Mourner: *Thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak Hands. Thy Words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble Knees: But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled. Is not this thy Fear, thy Confidence, thy Hope, and the Uprightness of thy Ways? Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished being innocent? or where were the Righteous cut off?* They are plainly Words of Accusation and Reproach.

AND now begins a Dispute between *Job* and his Friends, they all accusing him of Hypocrisy,

pocrify, and he vindicating his own Sincerity. The Dispute between him and *Eliphaz* begins Chap. ivth, is renewed in the xvth, and carried on in *this*, and concluded on the part of the Opponent, with the words of my Text. *Eliphaz*, far from yielding to righteous *Job*, still maintains, that God would never have punish'd him in such a severe manner, if he had not been an ill Man; and (as is too common even with good Men) in the progress of the Dispute, grew more fierce in his Temper, and more warm in his Expressions; yet being willing to close the Debate with some Moderation, he invites *Job* to Repentance, and shews him the happy Fruits hereof: Would he repent, he tells him, he should be freed from all his Calamities, enjoy a great deal of Good himself, and be the Instrument of much Good to others; *If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up; thou shalt put away* V. 23^d and *Iniquity far from thy Tabernacle.* onwards.

Thou shalt have thy Delight in the Almighty, thou shalt lift up thy Face unto God: He shall save the humble Person; "and " to finish all, thy Goodness shall extend to " all around thee; thy Repentance shall be " the Advantage of others; many shall reap " the Fruits of it. " He shall deliver the Island of the Innocent, and it is delivered by the Pureness of thy Hands.

It should seem, that *Eliphaz* intends to insinuate here, that *Job* did not pray with that Purity he pretended, because his Prayers, far from availing for others, at a distance, did not do it for himself, and his Children; but though he were mistaken in the Application, his Doctrine was doubtless good, viz. that the Safety of

of many is often owing to the Prayers of a few ; may that one good Man standing in the Breach, may effectually plead with God for many wicked ; if this be the Sense of the Words, they will not be improper to the Occasion now before us : Thus improv'd the Text will afford both Direction and Comfort to the Friends of God, and the Lovers of Prayer ; and how few soever associate to reform, and save a Nation, and how many soever the Difficulties they meet with may be, yet their Hearts being right with God, and their Supplications and Intercessions sincere, fervent and continual, God himself will be pleas'd with their Address, and the whole Island shall happily see and feel the vast Advantage of a few good People's Interest in Heaven.

THAT something near to this is the Sense of the Text, may perhaps appear from the following Explication of it.

IF we take the Words as they stand in our Bibles, *Eliphaz* must be understood thus. “ He
 “ whose Prerogative it is to save ; God, who al-
 “ ways can do it, who is much inclin'd to Mercy,
 “ and who has great Respect to good Men,
 “ and even delights in the Prayers of his Peo-
 “ ple ; will, at thy Request, deliver *the Island*,
 “ or, the whole Country round about thee :
 The word *Isle* or *Island*, not being taken strictly for such Lands as were separated from *Canaan* by the Sea, but for such as were upon the same *Continent* : And *it*, (i.e.) the *Island*, or *Country*, *is*, or *shall*, or, *will be*, delivered by the Pureness of thy Hands.

BUT the Words may be differently rendred. The marginal reading is, *The Innocent shall deliver the Island* : And to this some the rather incline, because an innocent Nation have no
 such

such need of Advocates, and the Intercession of others for their Deliverance : Were a Country generally innocent, (*i. e.*) prevailingly virtuous and good, this would be their great Protection ; God would not enter into Judgment with such a Society, severe Displeasure would not be shewn to such a People, nor any Wrath drawn down from Heaven upon them, such as to call for the loud Intercession of others in their Favour. But here, one is ready to say, Where is this happy People to be found ? Where is that *Fortunate Island*, which can in any proper Sense be call'd the *Island of the Innocent* ? Our own, I fear, is far from deserving this Character. Our Mercies indeed are many, and our Advantages above other Nations not a few ; our Situation and Climate, our Soil and Air, our Fruits and Manufactures, the Number and Temper of our Inhabitants, and the vast Extent (at least till very lately) of our Credit, Wealth, and Power ; above all, our Religion and Liberty have highly exalted our Nation, and made it *the Joy and the Praise of the whole Earth*. But alas ! our Sins also are but too visible ; our Abuse of Mercy very great, and our Disobedience and Perverseness very provoking. Our Iniquities are indeed more and greater than any thing, and every thing else, except it be the Patience, and Mercies of our gracious God ; the Sun, whose Beams visit and revive us, beholds our astonishing Guilt, and is a Witness that ours are not Deeds of Midnight Darkness only, but Sins in open Light ; the Earth groans, being burdened with Loads of Guilt, heavier far than its numerous Inhabitants ; the Air in which we breathe is infected with Oaths and Blasphemies, with filthy Conversation,

tion, and polluted Breath, so that one is ready to wonder God does not mingle pestilential Infection with it, and shoot the Arrows of his fiercest Wrath amongst us; surely there are some innocent Persons who deliver the Island, some pious, praying, Heaven-born Souls who preserve it; happy is it for us, that these do not wholly fail and cease amongst us; God increase their Number, and Crown their Zeal and Charity with great Success!

BUT because the word here rendred *Island*, is sometimes used for *not* in Scripture, some have thought the most probable Sense of the Text to be this: *He shall deliver him that is not Innocent*, (i.e.) the good Man shall deliver the guilty, or God at the Request of a good Man will deliver him that is not good; and *it*, or *he*, (i.e.) the guilty Person is, or *shall be delivered by the Pureness of Hands*. Which last Expression, *Pureness of Hands*, may be taken either for Freedom from Corruption and Bribery, like that of the Prophet; *He that despiseth the Gain of Oppression, that shaketh his Hands from holding of Bribes*: or else for devout Prayer, like that of the Apostle; *I will that Men pray every where, lifting up holy Hands*; or more largely still for true and sincere Piety: so the Man who is free from Hypocrisy, and of holy unblameable Conversation, is describ'd by the Psalmist, as one *who has clean Hands and a pure Heart*.

Isai. xxxiii. 15.
1 Tim. ii. 8.

WHICH of these ways soever the words are explain'd, they plainly put an Honour upon Piety and Prayer, and serve to shew us, that holy Men are a publick Good, and a very great Blessing to humane Society, and that even a few such Persons are a Nation's best, and greatest

est Treasure ; and this leads me to the following Doctrine.

Doct. THAT the Piety and Virtue of a few righteous Persons, may be a great means of preserving and delivering a sinful and threatened Nation.

Meth. THE Method I shall observe in speaking to this Doctrine is this:

1. I will enquire, What that Piety and Virtue is, which will probably preserve, and deliver a sinful and threatened Nation?

2. How this appears a proper means of so great and good an End?

3. WHAT is the use to be made of such a Subject, at this time?

1. WHAT is that Piety and Virtue, which will probably preserve, and deliver a sinful and threatened Nation?

IN Answer to this Enquiry, I think it proper to observe, that by Piety I understand the Duties, which more directly and immediately refer to God ; and by Virtue those which respect our selves, and our fellow Creatures; the difference between these two lies in the Object ; and tho' I think we may allowably distinguish, I readily own, we may not by any means separate them one from the other : Piety and Virtue, or in the Language of Inspiration, *Godliness* and *Honesty*, a *Conscience void of Offence towards God and Man* ; are but Parts of the same Religion, which is taught us in the sacred Scriptures, and exemplified in the Life of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST : The Word of GOD is the Rule both of personal and social Virtue, as well as of true and genuine Piety ; both likewise must have Respect to the Mediator, if good and acceptable in the

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sight of GOD; and result from the Operation of the holy and blessed Spirit upon our Souls: This only exalts Heathen Morality into Christian Virtue, and makes that Sobriety and Purity we owe to ourselves, and that Honesty, Moderation and Charity, which is due to others, really to deserve the Name of Goodness: Then only shall we *Cleanse our selves from all Filthiness, both of Flesh and Spirit, be found in Peace, without Spot, and Blameless*; then shall we *love our Neighbour as ourselves, provide things honest in the sight of all Men*, be chaste and temperate, just and righteous, charitable and useful, *not overcome with Evil, but able to overcome Evil with Good*; when the Fear and Love of GOD rules in our Hearts, as a governing Principle; and when *we are justified, wash'd and sanctified in the Name of the Lord JESUS, and by the Spirit of our GOD*. Nothing is more certain, than that all Vice is contrary to the Principles of universal Reason, and Virtue only consonant and agreeable hereunto; and I think it equally certain that then only is Reason an effectual Motive to the one, and a certain Restraint from the other, when it is assisted by the Word, and sanctified by the Spirit of GOD: Without this, Men are good as it were by accident, and at best but in part only; and if some be less vicious, and others more honest and useful, it is but as their present Interest, Inclination, or Opportunities lead them; he only is really and thoroughly virtuous, whose Heart is pure, and whose Hands are clean, and in whom the Love of Sin is in some good Measure conquered, as well as the Practice of it restrain'd by the Word and Spirit of GOD; when we are told expressly, that *without Faith it is impossible to please GOD*;
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we may be very sure, that however Men may boast of their Honesty and Honour, and how high soever their Pretences to them may run ; yet if they leave out *this*, it cannot be call'd Christian Virtue ; nor will it be always steddly and inflexible, Interest and Temptation will make it warp, and yield, and the Superstructure rais'd upon this, will be ever unsafe, because the Foundation on which it relies is weak and treacherous.

THUS much I thought proper to say in the general, concerning the Piety and Virtue, which may probably preserve and deliver a sinful and threatned Nation ; it may be farther illustrated, by being set in opposition to that Impiety and Vice, which threatens a general Ruin.

AND here we must begin with Atheism and Infidelity. When Men arrive at so great a degree of Stupidity, as to say there is no GOD, or believing his Existence (which indeed it is hardly possible wholly to deny) they will yet prophane his Sabbaths, and pollute his Sanctuary ; when People become so bold and daring, as to insult those Doctrines which are according to Godliness, and deride such as profess, assert and vindicate them ; when they are so impious and hardned, as to blaspheme that great and dreadful Name the Lord our GOD ; and not only not worship and glorifie the GOD of their Lives, in whose Hands their Breath is, but contemn his Authority, and violate his Laws, and without Fear or Shame, set their Faces against Heaven, provoking and defying Almighty Power, and Sin-avenging Wrath ; when divine Precepts strike no Awe upon Men's Spirits, and the most tremendous Threatnings of

GOD's Word affect them not ; when the Foundations of Piety are destroy'd, and every sacred Fence which Religion sets about the Throne of GOD, is thrown down and trampled under the Feet of Men ; what is likely to follow but common Calamity, and general Ruin ? Especially when hereupon all Iniquity abounds, and every Vice of depraved Nature is gratify'd, and abandon'd Sinners govern themselves by nothing but sensual Lusts and brutish Passions ? when prophane Cursing and Swearing is heard almost in every Place, and Men are so very wicked as to damn themselves and one another in Jest and Sport ; when Gluttony and Drunkenness, Debauchery and Lewdness, Sensuality, and every kind of Excess becomes general, in spite of the Laws both of GOD and Man ; when the Voice of Reason and Religion is disregarded, and Conscience and Conviction is restrain'd and stifled ; when Sin is made bold by its Numbers, the Reins thrown upon the Neck of Lust, and Vice rowls on like a swelling Torrent, whose proud Waves are not to be stemm'd and resisted, and the generality act as if there were no difference between Good and Evil, between *him that feareth GOD*, and *him that feareth him not* ; what is there in such a miserable State of Things that we may not fear ? What smart Strokes of Affliction, heavy Wrath, and severe Judgments of GOD, may we suppose likely to follow such daring and triumphant Wickedness as this ? Finally, when the Bands of Society are broken by Pride and Covetousness, Perjury and Falsehood, Oppression and Cruelty ; when Men are false to one another, as they are disobedient to GOD, and the Vices which naturally tend to dissolve Society, are practis'd

practis'd by all the Ranks of those that constitute it ; when the Rich indulge to Excess, and the Poor to Idleness and Sloth ; when People are selfish and narrow spirited, seeking greedily whatever they can get, and looking upon all about them with an evil Eye ; when they are clamorous and discontented, and by one another's Murmurs and Complaints, prepar'd to take Vengeance even of any thing, except of themselves, and their Sins ; these are the things which defile a Nation, expose it to the Wrath of GOD, and threaten it with fearful Judgments and speedy Ruin.

THE Piety and Virtue which alone can remedy this Evil, will now appear to be this :

I. A true and becoming Fear of GOD.

A due Veneration for his Majesty and Authority, his Attributes and Laws, his Truths and Ways and People ; a sincere Desire of his Favour, and a Dread of his Displeasure and Wrath ; sincere and continual Prayer to GOD, and a devout and regular Attendance upon all the Parts of his instituted Worship ; a Concern to obtain from him the several Blessings of Life, and Religion thro' the powerful Interest of the great Mediator, and that he may be pleas'd and pacify'd by the Blood and Merit of his blessed Son, and prevail'd upon to hear our humble Prayer, *not to cast us away from his Presence, nor to turn away his holy Spirit from Us* : When Men of Power and Interest set themselves, and stir up others, to invoke the God of Heaven, and shew Concern for the Recovery of his Fear and Honour in the Nation ; bear their Testimony against all Impiety, and shew a becoming Zeal for all that, by which GOD makes himself known, this is that *Blessing of the Upright*
by

by which the City is preserved ; and which the
 Prov. ix. *wife Man opposes to the Mouth of*
 [11. *the Wicked by which it is overthrown.*

Add to this,

2. THE Exercise of personal Virtue.

SOBRIETY, for instance, and Purity of Heart and Life, or the Subjection of our Appetites and Passions, to the Conduct and Direction of Reason and Religion ; Temperance and Chastity, Meekness and Modesty, Patience, Contentment and Command of Temper, in Opposition to the Impiety of the Swearer, the Debauchery of the Drunkard, the Filthiness of the Unclean, the Passion of the Wrathful, the Perjury of the False and Treacherous, and the great Uneasiness of the Fretful, the Envious and the Discontented : Thus the Apostle in his

Advices to the Christians at *Philippi*, exhorts them to imitate every commendable Thing they observed even in their Heathen Neighbours,
 Philip. iv. 8. *Whatsoever Things are true, whatsoever Things are honest, whatsoever Things are just, whatsoever Things are pure, whatsoever Things are lovely, whatsoever Things are of good Report ; or, if there be any thing else justly to be esteem'd virtuous, or deserving Praise, think on these Things, and he adds afterwards, the God of Peace shall be with you.*

3. THE Practice of all social Virtue.

SUCH as Justice and Righteousness, Faith and Truth, Charity and Mercy, Peace and Concord, Submission and Obedience to our Superiors, and Courtesy, Affability and Love to our Inferiors and Equals ; these and such like Virtues strengthen the Bands of Society, unite the Members of it in one common Interest, repair

pair the disordered Foundations, will strengthen all the Parts, and give Order, Beauty and Life to the whole.

AND this brings me to enquire,

2. How it appears that Piety and Virtue is a proper Means to this good End, the preserving and delivering a sinful and threatned Nation?

AND to this I answer, It is a natural, and it is an instituted Means.

1. IT is a natural Means.

Righteousness exalteth a Nation, but Sin is a Reproach to any People. The Prov. xiv. 34.

one naturally advances it to Honour, the other unavoidably brings it to Contempt. Piety and Virtue seem to have the same Influence upon the Political Body, that Temperance and Exercise have upon the Natural One; they preserve it from Distemper, and increase its Strength. This not only appears in Fact, but may, I think, be accounted for by the plain Reason of Things: True Piety makes Men just and generous, sober and temperate, grave and good; and Christian Virtue emboldens the Mind, and elevates the Soul above Things base and vile, false and treacherous, unjust and cruel. *He who sets the Lord always before him, will walk uprightly, and work Righteousness, and speak the Truth in his Heart; he will do no Evil to his Neighbour, in his Person, Reputation or Estate; he will be a Man of Probity and Truth; you may rely on his Word, and be secure of his Faith; and should he swear to his own Hurt, he will not change.* He is not to be threatned out of his Virtue, nor bribed into the Practice of Vice; he has nothing to hope, or fear, so much as the Favour, or Anger of GOD; and has no Pleasure so great as the Friendship of Heaven,

Heaven, and the Peace of his Conscience; nor any Pain so bitter, as inward Anguish, and God's Displeasure. It is therefore easy to apprehend, that did such Persons constitute, and such Principles as these adorn Society, it must needs be prosperous and happy. Who sees not the evident Connection between the Love of God, and that of our Neighbour; true Piety, and the Good of Mankind; the Practice of Religion, and the Love of Liberty; the Service of God, and that of our Generation? Let Men be chaste and temperate, and they will be brave and honest: Make them industrious and frugal, and you make them rich and thriving; and as they grow into the Love of Liberty, Moderation and Charity, they will be good Subjects, quiet Neighbours, and sincere and hearty Friends. Whereas Impiety and Vice is the Bane of all that is good, and the Source of all that is evil: An ill Man is base and treacherous, timorous and ungrateful, oppressive and cruel; being false to God and himself, he is so to his Neighbour, and therefore incapable of Love and Friendship, because vicious and debauched. Lust is such an unruly, impetuous Thing, that nothing just, or dear, or sacred will restrain it: You can have no Dependance on a Man who acts upon such Principles, only as he is afraid or ashamed to own; the very Actions which load him with Guilt, put him upon others worse and more vile, in order to conceal his Shame, or escape Punishment: And if this vicious Temper becomes popular and unrestrained, enters into the several Branches of Society, and makes the Infection general, it will blast like Lightning, and consume like a Pestilence; every good Thing will wither and die away, and all

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that is Evil grow up in its stead: Increasing Guilt always makes way for abounding Misery, and there is as natural a Connection between those two, as between the Darkness, and the Damps of Night. Impiety naturally tends to Inhumanity; a Contempt of God, to a Carelessness of our selves and others; and a Defiance of the divine Laws, to that of the best and wisest Laws of Men; profane Swearing tends to Perjury; Drunkenness and Uncleaness, to Idleness, Want and Beggary; Pride and Covetousness, leads Men to Gaming, and other unjust and dishonest Gain; and Luxury and Excess, exposes them to the Temptation of Bribery, and *taking a Reward even against the Innocent*. Whence come Wars, and other publick Calamities, but from the Lusts of Men? These break the Bands of Society, weaken and enervate every Sinew of Government, raise unnatural Contention, and invite foreign Invasion; and in case of either, a vicious debauched People, what with the Avarice of some, the broken and desperate Fortunes of others, the Discontent and Revenge of many, and the Carelessness, Indolence, and Stupidity of more, is deprived both of Counsel and Strength, and either too weak to attempt their own Salvation, or too effeminate and cowardly to effect it. That Nations have thriven in Wealth, encreased in Power, and flourished in Reputation and Fame, so long as they have continued virtuous; and declined in every thing great and good, comfortable, and valuable, as they have fallen into Debauchery and Vice, can appear from no Instance more remarkable, than that of *Rome*: Justice and Generosity, Temperance, Frugality, and other Virtues, had exalted that Common-

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wealth to the Empire of the World; but when it became infected with the Lewdness and Luxury of Greece, the Genius of that brave People was debased; the Love of Pleasure dissolved their Spirits, and consumed their Strength; Civil Wars distracted them at home, and their Power hereupon declined abroad, till at length they were overthrown by the more virtuous, tho' barbarous Nations of the North.

2. IT is an instituted Means.

THIS appears from the frequent Promises in Sacred Scripture, of National Blessings to Piety and Virtue; and National Judgments to Impiety and Vice: So *Levit. xxvi. 3.* and following Verses; *If ye walk in my Statutes, and keep my Commandments, and do them; then I will give you Rain in due Season, and the Land shall yield her Increase; and ye shall eat your Bread to the full, and dwell in your Land safely; and I will give Peace in the Land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid; and I will rid evil Beasts out of the Land; neither shall the Sword go through the Land; and ye shall chase your Enemies, and they shall fall before you by the Sword; and I will have Respect unto you, and establish my Covenant with you, and set my Tabernacle amongst you; and I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my People.* Here you have a fair Catalogue of the Blessings promised to *Israel*, as the Reward of their Duty and Obedience to God, and his Laws; viz. Plenty of the Fruits of the Earth; Peace at home, and Victory in Wars abroad; an Increase of People; Preservation from Things hurtful; the Favour of God, and the Tokens of his Presence, and the Grace of his Covenant, as the Sweetness and Security of all their Happiness:

Happiness: But in case of wilful and obstinate Sin they are very severely threatned, and a very black Catalogue of National Judgments is set before them, as the certain Consequence of it; God himself (they are told) would be against them; the whole Creation would make War upon them; Diseases would consume their Inhabitants, and Famine their Land; the Sword of the Enemy would destroy many, and drive the rest into fenced Cities, and there the Pestilence would seize such as had escaped the Sword; or if any escaped both, then Captivity would be their Lot, and Dispersion among the Heathen: *ψ. 14. If ye will not hearken unto me, and do all these Commandments, if ye shall despise my Statutes, and your Soul abhor my Judgments, I also will do this unto you, I will appoint over you Terror, Consumption, and the burning Ague; ye shall sow your Seed in vain, for your Enemies shall eat it; ye shall be slain before your Enemies; they that hate you shall reign over you, and ye shall flee when none pursueth you: And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your Sins; and I will break the Pride of your Power; and I will make your Heaven as Iron, and your Earth as Brass, and your Strength shall be spent in vain, for your Land shall not yield her Increase: And I will bring a Sword upon you, that shall avenge the Quarrel of my Covenant; and when ye are gathered together within your Cities, I will send the Pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the Hand of the Enemy. Thus must those who had sinned together fall together; and having first increased one another's Guilt, must next increase one another's Fear, and Shame, and Misery.*

I MIGHT turn you farther to the xxviiith Chapter of *Deuteronomy*, where you have the Blessings of Obedience, and the Curses of Disobedience set over against each other: *If thou wilt hearken diligently to the Voice of the LORD thy GOD, to observe and do all his Commandments which I command thee this Day, the LORD thy GOD will set thee on high above all Nations of the Earth, and all these Blessings shall come upon thee; blessed shalt thou be in the City, and blessed shalt thou be in the Field; blessed shall be the Fruit of thy Body, and the Fruit of thy Ground, and the Fruit of thy Cattle; blessed shall be thy Basket, and thy Store; blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out, &c.*

Ver. 15.
See the
whole Ch.

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the Voice of the LORD thy GOD, to observe to do all his Commandments and Statutes which I command thee this Day, then all these Curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee; cursed shalt thou be in the City, and cursed shalt thou be in the Field; cursed shall be thy Basket, and thy Store; cursed shall be the Fruit of thy Body, and the Fruit of thy Land, the Increase of thy Kine, and the Flocks of thy Sheep; cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out, &c.

AND though temporal Blessings, as the Reward of Piety and Virtue, were chiefly promis'd under the Old Testament, yet the New one is not wholly silent upon this Head, there

Matt. vi.
33.

you are directed to seek first the Kingdom of GOD, and his Righteousness, and assured that so doing, all other Things shall be added; again it

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is demanded by the Apostle, *if God be for Us, who can be against Us?* We are likewise assur'd, that if we belong to God, *all things are Ours*; and told by the same Apostle, *that Godliness is profitable to all Things; having the Promise of the Life that now is, and that which is to come.*

Rom. viii.

31.

1 Cor. iii.

21.

1 Tim. iv.

8.

AND GOD, who is ever faithful to his Word and Covenant, has plainly in the course of his Providence, either granted or suspended his Favour, either increas'd and built up, or broken down and destroy'd, Nations and Communities, according as they have been virtuous or vicious, pious or profane. The History of the Jewish Common-wealth, contain'd in the two Books of *Kings*, is a very great Confirmation of this; it begins at the Close of *David's* Reign, and goes down to the *Babylonish* Captivity, which was the space of above four hundred Years, in all which Time they were a happy or an unhappy People, as they were holy or unholy; when they obeyed the Voice of the Lord, and kept close to him in the way of their Duty, he bless'd and prosper'd them; and when they departed from him and were disobedient, he made them feel the Smart of his Rod; this therefore may be considered as an historical Confirmation of this Truth, that Piety and Virtue will preserve a Nation, and Impiety and Vice will ruin and destroy it.

BUT if it should be said, suppose a Nation to be generally impious and corrupt, and there be but a few only whose Hearts tremble at God's Word, and who take upon them to become humble Intercessors for their unhappy Country, what may be expected in that Case? I answer with

with *Eliphaz* in my Text, G O D for their sakes will probably preserve and deliver the guilty : He would have spared all the Inhabitants of *Sodom*, had ten righteous Persons been found there ; and as it was, G O D went on granting, till *Abraham* left off asking ; nay if there should be none righteous, yet if G O D's Word or Providence makes a sinful People penitent, then their Repentance, which is initial Piety, shall be accepted ; thus *Nineveh* that great City was spared, though their Destruction was positively threatned, and the Time of it fixed by the Word of G O D : Nay in the instance of *Abab*, we find that even external Humiliation may procure a Suspension of Judgment ; if it be sincere Repentance, G O D will revoke the Sentence of Wrath, and if it be but external, yet forasmuch as it gives some Glory to G O D, he will be so good as to suspend the Execution of his Sentence, and grant a Reprieve ; this is so much the more remarkable, as *Abab* is said to have

1 Kings
xxi. 25,
26.

sold himself to work Wickedness, and to have done very abominably. G O D will never have it said that he is unmerciful, he is more ready to shew Mercy

than Sinners are to ask it ; Judgment was always his strange Work, and every Age of the World has Reason to say with his People of old, *Who is a G O D like unto thee, that pardoneth Iniquity that passeth by the Transgression of the Remnant of thy Heritage ; who retainest not thine Anger for ever, because thou delightest in Mercy ?* Mich. vii. 18.

THE Application of this Subject now follows.

I. IT appears from hence, that Wickedness and wicked Men, are the Mischief and Misery of a Nation.

SIN is the black Fountain, from whence proceed the many Streams of publick and national Misery, and Sinners the cruel Hands which draw down Confusion and Mischief on themselves and others. GOD for this Cause gave *Jacob* to the Spoil, and *Israel* to the Robbers, made the Heaven as Brass, and the Earth as Iron, delivered their Sons to the Sword, and their Daughters to Captivity; hence comes the Curse of GOD and Destruction upon a Nation, the loss of all that is Good, and the too just fear of all that is Evil; hence are the Desolations that are made in the Earth, the Cries of the Oppress'd, and the Groans of the Miserable; rampant and uncontrouled Lusts, the Blasphemy, Lewdness and Debauchery, which revel in the Streets and Markets, and spread through the several Ranks and Orders of Men, these blast the Reputation of a Nation, strike down her Credit and Power, devour her Wealth, stop up the Channels of Trade, involve all things in Confusion, and give her over to Oppression and Misery; they are the Men who ruin their Country, *That draw Iniquity with the Cords of Vanity, and Sin as it were with a Cart Rope*; the common Swearers and Drunkards, lewd, unclean, malicious, false and lying People, are a common Nuisance, and the publick Mischief of a Nation: And when we hear of the dark Assemblies of the wicked, where they tempt one another to Evil, and strengthen themselves in Iniquity, whither heedless Youth are enticed, and Persons of good Education, who till then perhaps were virtuous and sober, and as to the grosser Acts of Sin, at least unstain'd, where Immorality is encouraged upon Principles of Infidelity, and People are taught to deride things sacred

sacred, that they may sin without a trembling and misgiving Heart ; where every sensual Appetite is indulged, and all things rational and virtuous are drown'd in Musick and Liquor ; outrageous Laughter and unmanly Mirth ; where the Night is consum'd in Deeds more dark than it self, and the Day breaks upon them without Shame ; when the Iniquity perpetrated in such Places, is carried out from thence into all Quarters, spreading like a Deluge, and feebly if at all oppos'd, you presently perceive what are the Things, and who are the People that defile and threaten the Land.

2. THE great Absurdity of reproaching and injuring righteous People.

THESE, tho' by Inclination and Principle useful and peaceable, are yet often ill used by the wicked: *They who will live godly in CHRIST JESUS must suffer Persecution* ; if by the Favour of GOD they escape the ungodly Deeds, yet they seldom come off without the hard Speeches of the prophane and profligate, among whom they dwell: *Puritan* was formerly a Term of Reproach, and now, I fear, *Saint* is a Name given by some in a way of Derision, as if it were not enough that People are wicked themselves, but they will not endure any should be, at least, that they should be supposed and thought to be otherwise : But is it indeed an Accomplishment to banter and reproach virtuous Men ? Is this all that the Wit of fine Gentlemen serves for ? Where, I wonder, is the Sense of having a Fling at Piety, and vilifying Men that fear GOD ? What occasion have they given for abusive Language, and impious Treatment ? Who are useful Members of Society, if not Men of Godliness and Honesty ? Who
may

may be relied on, if not such as are virtuous on Principle? Who are likely to be good Friends and Neighbours, if not they that exercise themselves to keep a Conscience void of Offence? And if it be true that God often spares a Nation for the sake of a few good People in it, to injure such is a great Absurdity; it is as if Men should destroy their own Foundations, and dig away the Ground on which they should stand. But it was long ago observed, that *the Upright in the Way is an Abomination to the Wicked*; and, *As he that was born after the Flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now*. This, however, should neither provoke nor discourage good People; a conscious Integrity, and the Honour to have Power with God, will carry such thro' any Opposition, and ever so much Reproach; what is the wry Mouth of the Scorners, where there is the Favour of God, and the Smiles of his Countenance? *Let them curse,* says he, *but bless thou*: No matter for the Reproaches of Men, if there be but Acceptance with God. This can be no real Hurt to the Righteous, and is one of the many Absurdities in the Behaviour of the Wicked; and shews the great Propriety of Sacred Writ, where *Fool* and *Sinner* are but different Names for the same Person.

Prov. xxix.

27.
Gal. iv. 29.Psal. cix.
28.

3. WHAT a Motive and Encouragement is this to Piety and Virtue?

REAL Goodness is not only a personal Advantage, but a publick and national Blessing; it is a natural and the instituted Means of Preservation and Deliverance: This, were it but general, would secure to us the Favour of God,

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make

make us strong as a fenced City, and terrible as
an Army with Banners: We need not
 Psal. xci. *then be afraid for the Terror by Night,*
 5, 6. *nor for the Arrow that flieth by Day;*
nor for the Pestilence that walketh in Darknes,
nor for the Destruction that wasteth at Noon-day.

Psal. cxliv. This would make our Sons as Plants
 12—14. *grown up in their Youth; and our*
Daughters as Corner-stones polished af-
ter the similitude of a Palace; our Garners full,
affording all manner of Store; and our Sheep to
bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our
Streets; our Oxen strong to labour; and that there
be no breaking in, nor going out, nor complaining in
our Streets. Besides that good People are the
 best and most useful Members of Society, on
 account of their Uprightness and Honesty;
 their Industry and Diligence; their Frugality
 and Temperance; their *studying to be quiet, and*
to do their own Business; and if it be possible, and
as much as lies in them, to live peaceably with all
Men; they are likewise a People who give
themselves unto Prayer, who cry unto God
Day and Night for their Native Country, and
give him no rest till he establish it, and make it a
Joy, and a Praise in the Earth. They are a
 real Blessing to the Age and Place where they
 live; ill People owe their Preservation to them,
 and the Community is obliged to them in no
 small Measure for their Prosperity and Success;
 if Mercy be procured it is very much through
 their Means; if a Storm arises, they are most
 likely to scatter and disperse it; and when God
 has a Controversy with the Land, they must be
 instrumental to make it up: The great Honour
 which God puts upon good People, appears
 † from

from the many Instances upon Record of the Virtue and Power of Prayer, every one of which encourages them to believe this, and obliges them to continue instant in it; YOU, Sirs, who fear the Name of GOD, are the People to whom he looks, and from whom he expects to hear continually: Your Religion obliges you to honour GOD, to be charitable and useful to Men, and to *put on Bowels of Compassion* to your bleeding Country; you know there are many Abominations committed in the Land, see you to it that there be some holy Perfume ascending up unto Heaven from every Quarter; there are Oaths and Curses uttered in every Place, enough to infect the Air, as well as provoke the Anger of God; let there be also Prayers, Supplications, and Intercessions offered up at the same time, *to enter into the Ears of the LORD of Sabbaoth: Ye are the Salt of the Earth, and the Light of the World; GOD* would make quick Work with Sinners, were it not for the Remnant of the Righteous, who dwell among them: As they dishonour GOD, you should honour him; as they blaspheme, you should pray; as they maintain the Devil's Interest, you should assert and vindicate God's; and the more is done by such to draw down the Wrath of GOD, so much the more should be done by you, to restrain that Wrath, and to draw down his Pity and Mercy: This you should do, because God has a manifest Regard to your sincere Piety, and humble incessant Prayer; his Eye is upon you, and his Hand works for you; by this means you deliver your own Souls, give the warmest Evidence of your Zeal for GOD, and the sincerest Proof of your

Compassion to the Bodies and Souls of Men; moreover, your Instrumentality in the Preservation of others, may be improved as a Pledge of your own future eternal Salvation. And finally, now only is the Time, and this World only is the Place, in which you can deliver others; hereafter in the Great Day your Purity and Innocence will avail for your selves only; then no Man, however good, or Number of Men, however pure, can redeem their Neighbours, or their Brethren, or give to GOD a Ransom for them.

I CONCLUDE with observing,

4. THE Reason and Usefulness of these Societies.

IF Religion and Virtue be the Safety and Glory of a Nation, and Irreligion and Vice its Reproach and Misery; then doubtless whatever is a proper Means of promoting the one, and of discouraging and suppressing the other, ought to be attempted and pursued. That THESE SOCIETIES are a proper Means of doing this, may appear to any considerate Person: The End they propose is the Honour of GOD, the Safety and Happiness of the Nation, and the Reformation of vile and scandalous Sinners; the Means they use, is, the regular Execution of those Laws the Wisdom of the Nation has deliberately enacted; and the Motives by which they are urged to this pious and charitable Work, they can appeal to all Men, are not worldly and secular Advantage, much less private Revenge, or a busy intermeddling with other Peoples Matters; but a Zeal for God and Goodness, a Hatred of Sin and Wickedness, a Desire of Publick Order, and a Dread of national

tional Confusion, and common Calamity, the natural and unavoidable Consequence of abounding Impiety, and unrestrained Vice: Lower Views than these, would not, I think, support and encourage their Undertaking, which I am sorry to say is attended with great Opposition and Difficulty, and in many Instances with no small Hazard and Danger: And whosoever considers the Policy and Power of the Patrons of Vice; what dear Things sinful Gratifications are to wicked Men; how mutually the Profane and Profligate would combine together, to make a Stand against Reformation, and by all the Arts of Contrivance and Power of Gold, defend their infamous Liberty, and defeat this good Design, will see, that it became necessary for the Friends of Religion and Virtue to associate, and form themselves into regular Bodies, in order to strengthen each others Hands, sustain the Derision and Fury of their Enemies, and secure the Success of their Undertaking: And now, Gentlemen of these Societies, I take leave to congratulate with you upon the Success you have met with in this Work; and that having obtain'd help of GOD you continue to combat with bold and daring Sin; you know the World too well, to suppose yours should be an easie Undertaking; you must not wonder that the prophane and licentious Multitude are against you to a Man, they who are so ignorant and hardned as to call *Evil Good, and Good Evil; to put Darknes for Light, and Light for Darknes*; who call it good Breeding to Swear, good Fellowship to be Drunk, and Gallantry to be Lewd and Unclean, they, no doubt, will endeavour to defame you, misrepresent your Actions, speak all manner of Evil
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of you falsely, and if it should be in their Power, insult and abuse your Persons ; nor must you be discouraged if you are not always supported, where you might reasonably expect Support ; it is to be feared you will find, in some who should be your Friends, a culpable Indolence, and in others a cold Neutrality ; but still you must go on with your pious Design ; the Laws of GOD and your Country are with you ; you began under the auspicious Influence of the best of QUEENS, and you are now encouraged by our present gracious KING ; Magistrates in exalted Stations have own'd your Cause, and done you the Honour to Countenance your prudent, just and legal Prosecutions ; you have the Prayers of all good Men for you, and the Consciences even of the wicked are on your side : Fear not therefore to challenge the boldest Sinner, inform against those who defy the Laws of GOD and Men, scorning the unjust Reproach of the Scornful, let the Mercies of GOD to your Country, excite you to express your Thankfulness to him, by attempting a farther Reformation of Manners ; and the Judgments of GOD, which are gone forth into the Earth, quicken your Zeal ; the continuance of the Plague in a neighbouring Nation, and its being hitherto restrain'd from this, is a double Motive to you, to prosecute daring Impiety, to pursue and search out secret Wickedness, and make those vile, lewd, disorderly Creatures afraid of Punishment, who can't be made ashamed of Sin : And give me leave to add, while you reprove and chastise others, take, I beseech you, the greatest heed to your selves ; be sure that you be Men of clean Hands and a pure Heart ;
 Piety,

Piety, Prudence, Integrity and Circumspection cannot be too much inculcated upon you, many Eyes watch, and wish for your halting, a Mistake on your part, will be magnified into a high Crime, and any Miscarriage among you exceedingly disserve the Cause you profess to espouse; it has been your Honour to approve your Virtue in the sight of Men, and that your Enemies have not been able to convince you of the Sins they were glad to lay to your Charge; nevertheless, such as you and I should take it well, to be reminded of such a warm Expostulation as that of the Apostle: *Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thy self? Thou that preachest a Man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a Man should not commit Adultery, dost thou commit Adultery? Thou that abhorrest Idols, dost thou commit Sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the Law, through breaking the Law, dishonourest thou God?* This would be highly unsuitable to your Design, unworthy your Character, and very absurd. He will be an improper Person to pluck a Mote out of his Brother's Eye, who has a Beam in his own: We all know the mighty Force and Power of Example, and therefore nothing is more to be wish'd, than that Magistrates, Ministers, and the Reformers of others, should be themselves strictly virtuous, and exemplarily good: *Only let your own Conversation be such as becomes the Gospel of CHRIST*; your Endeavour to reform others, proceed from an apparent Desire of their present and future Welfare, your Informations against their Crimes prudent and just, and your Prosecutions timely and impartial; and God will

Rom. ii.

21, 22,

23.

will bless you, and it is to be hop'd you will be supported and assisted by the Advice of some, the Power and Authority of others, the Purges of many, and the Prayers of all Men, who tender the Honour of God Almighty, and sincerely wish the Safety and Happiness of the KING and Kingdom.

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